

Political performativity and the federal state of Belgium- The Belgian example as a laboratory for performative knowledge

Global terrorism shows the border situation of political performance. In a certain way, it serves as the radical point of reference for contemporary political performativity, perhaps even for the epistemology of political and societal crises. The classical, often theatrical, metalanguage to deal with radical political events – ‘tragedy’, ‘heroism’, ‘clash’,... - is tested to its extremes. Perhaps, it even forces us to develop a new epistemology of political performances. What does retaliation mean? What does war mean? What does civilization mean? The concept is ‘crisis’ is probably the central concept in this epistemology. The financial ‘crisis’ of 2008 has on the same scale contributed to the same conceptual problem, even when economic discourse has relatively fixed meaning for phenomena such as ‘recession’ and ‘depression’.

In my paper I will focus on the shape this epistemological problem takes in the small, unspectacular country of Belgium. The federal state of Belgium suffers from a political impasse since 2007, due to its complex institutional framework, to its unclearly structured stage(s) of political performativity. But behind the institutional issues larger problems have become visible: multidirectional identities, (im)balances of power, notions of political representation, reassessment of economic values. In this way, Belgium shows a (non-violent) microcosm of the globalization of political performance.

In its presentation, my contribution will use itself a performative format: elements of a treatment of a fictional TV-series on recent Belgian history. This ‘dramatic’ text will serve as the basis to elaborate, more theoretically, concepts of play, game, performative knowledge and other notions Richard Schechner coined in his anthropology of performance.

About the Author

Dr. Klaas Tindemans is a dramaturge and a legal philosopher. He collaborated with theatre director Ivo van Hove (1987-1993) as his dramaturge in productions of, amongst others, **Ajax** and **Antigone** (Sophocles) **Bacchanals** (Euripides). He was research assistant at the Centre for the Study of the Foundations of Law (K.U. Leuven), founded by prof. Jan M. Broekman, who coached his doctoral thesis (Ph.D.) in 1996, titled **Law and tragedy. The scene of the law in the ancient polis**.

Today he teaches performance theory and dramaturgy at Erasmushogeschool Brussel/RITS, the Brussels school of performing and audio-visual arts, where he also participates in the research program **The document as performance. The performance as a document**, a project of interdisciplinary artistic research into theatricality and reality. He teaches as a

guest professor at the post-graduate Theatre Science (University of Antwerp) and at the Herman Teirlinck Instituut, the Antwerp theatre school. He also works as dramaturge with the Antwerp based players' collective De Roovers and with the Brussels youth theatre BRONKS, for which he wrote and directed the plays **Bulger** - (2006) – awarded with the 'Förderpreis für neue Dramatik' at the Theatertreffen in Berlin – and **Sleutelveld** (2009). Both plays deal with children and violence.

Dr. Klaas Tindemans publishes about legal theory, political representation, theatricality and their mutual intertwinements. He translated, in 1993, Euripides' **Medea**. He edited books on youth theatre in Brussels (2002) and on the American playwright David Mamet (2005).

Today, he prepares a youth novel based upon his play **Bulger**, a political 'dream play' (**Burcht**) and, together with performance artist and stand-up comedian Joost Vandecasteele, a TV-series on the complexity of Belgian politics with the provisional title **Parc/Park**.